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TO THE CLERGY AND LAITY

OF THE

DIOCESE OF NEW YORK.

BELOVED BRETHREN:

H. Potter

In a crisis so momentous as the present, in the affairs of this our beloved country, I make no apology for coming before you with a few earnest words.

At a moment when these States have advanced to a position which commands the respectful attention of the whole civilized world; when the nations of Europe, full of wonder and expectation, are contemplating our astonishing development, and watching the course of our experiment in government; when our power, stretching from the one ocean to the other, sits secure, as no other people are secure, from fear of foreign invasion; at a moment when the whole country is flushed with health and strength, and when a gracious Providence has vouchsafed to us a season of unexampled abundance, with no new element of strife in our system which was not equally present when *this government of conciliation and compromise* was first organized, at such a moment, our great

political fabric is shaken by internal dissensions, by the conflict of sectional passions, and we, who might have been envied among the nations of the earth for our greatness, no less than for our happiness, we seem to be preparing to cast madly away from us all the blessings of Providence, and to bring down upon ourselves dishonor and ruin by our own fratricidal violence.

To the eye of the Christian Patriot, what a melancholy spectacle does the condition of this great country present! Members of the same political family, children of confederated parents, who stood side by side in the struggle of the Revolution, now so intent upon crimination and recrimination—now so passionately absorbed in the contemplation of one point of difference, so eager in contention about it, that they have lost sight of all that is excellent in each other's character, and have become incapable of doing justice to each other's feelings, principles and conduct! Narrow and partial views have been put forth to work upon men's passions, exaggeration and misrepresentation have inflamed and alienated contending sections, until men's hearts have been well nigh changed toward each other: hatred has taken the place of love, and too often, even, the senate chamber and the pulpit, forgetful of their high function, have been converted into fountains of bitter waters.

Beloved Brethren: I know that to this sad statement there are great and honorable exceptions. I know that in the North, and believe also in the South, there are multitudes of noble men, of enlarged views and patriotic

spirit, who cannot be induced to narrow their sympathies to any one class or section, but who look upon the country, and the whole country, as the one blood-bought heritage, in every part of which they have an interest and a pride, and to every part of which they owe equal and most important duties. I know, too, that the church of our affections has been most honorably distinguished by her pacific and fraternal spirit, and by her entire exemption from all sectional disputes and divisions. It is this fact that encourages me to appeal to you in the present crisis. For every man that loves his country, and his whole country, for every man capable of rising above narrow views and local passions, and who has a soul magnanimous enough to do justice to those who differ from him, the hour is come for the performance of a great duty:—the duty of carrying out those principles of conciliation and compromise, on which this government was founded, and by adhering to which alone it can be maintained:—the duty of putting forth a patriotic influence, each in his own sphere, which shall be in favor of peace and charity, which shall tend to recall men's minds to the contemplation of obligations which they owe to their whole country, and which shall help to revive a disposition to do the same justice to other people's feelings, interests and characters, which we desire to have done to our own.

It is in vain to ask, who has been most in fault. It is a low and sordid thing to stop and inquire, who is to suffer most from the impending calamity. All will suffer.

All have been in fault; although it may be conceded that people, when rushing on under the influence of different interests and different habits of thought, have come into violent collision from want of consideration, and from want of experience, in regard to the dangers of such a collision, and have been, by no means, deliberately and consciously guilty of the wrong which might, at first view, seem to be imputable to them.

But the time is come to pause in our headlong career; to open our eyes to a wider survey of our relations and duties, and to ascend to a higher position, whence we may cast a look of equal and loving regard over the people and fortunes of all these States.

We may say, in our pride and our resentment, that we, in our section, can do very well by ourselves. Other sections, under the same influences, may say the same miserable thing. But, say what we will, in our moment of passion, we all have need of each other. In sickness, each flies to the climate of the other for relief—and this is but a type of the marvelous way in which all our interests and all our activities are interlaced, and made mutually dependent upon each other. Besides, who can contemplate the animosities sure to be engendered by rival organizations, without a feeling of horror? Who can look forward to the petty jealousies, the feuds, the hostile legislation, the impeded intercourse, social and commercial, the fratricidal wars likely to arise among a number of insignificant states, as contemptible for their pride and irritability as for their weakness, without a fervent prayer

to Almighty God, that of His infinite mercy He would be pleased to spare this hitherto happy country such a disastrous and dishonorable future !

No ! my brethren. You will agree with me that what we need, what we desire, what we ardently pray for, is, that our glorious country may remain, as Providence has given it to us—one and entire. Let us set our faces toward a work of conciliation. Let us encourage an earnest endeavor to find out some basis for a permanent settlement of existing questions, which shall be clear and satisfactory to reasonable minds in all parts of the country. Let us hope, and let us pray, that our public men may be enabled, may be guided by an overruling Providence, to such a blessed consummation. That such an object is attainable, with God's blessing upon the hearty endeavors of our rulers and of our people, it would be alike unreasonable and impious to doubt. That it is possible to arrange some great measure of guarantees and securities that will afford due protection to every section of the country, without demanding a sacrifice of principle from any, is a belief which no Christian patriot will surrender, until all shall have been lost in darkness and ruin.

But such a work calls for kindness, and patience and conciliation in rulers and in people. It demands a magnanimous and patriotic spirit. It requires that every state and every section look not only on its own things, but also on the things of others, and that it make a conscience of being as scrupulously careful of the feelings

and interests of other sections as of its own. And if there be any state or section in the Union, which can afford to go far in the way of conciliation — which should it be, but our own, which is preëminent in power, and which possesses within itself all the elements of prosperity and greatness.

You will give me credit, beloved brethren, for speaking from a heart, which, knowing nothing of party passions or sectional jealousies, glows with zeal for the peace, the honor and the welfare of the whole country. And your generous minds will respond to your Bishop's voice.

Let us fly to Him who can speak peace to the stormy passions of men. Let us humble ourselves before Almighty God. Let us discourage criminations, and recriminations in regard to the past. Let us invoke a spirit of justice and moderation. Let us set continually before our minds, the unquestionable fact that there are people in every other section of the country as patriotic, as full of Christian feeling and principle, as are any among ourselves. Let us throw ourselves, with fresh eyes and fervent hearts, into all those prayers in our Liturgy which beg God's blessing upon our rulers and people; which implore His guidance for our men in council; which supplicate for unity, peace and concord; which beseech deliverance for ourselves from envy, hatred, malice and all uncharitableness; which send up a cry to God for His mercy upon us, as "vile earth and miserable sinners." If we look into the Litany, into the prayer for

Congress, into the prayer for the President and all others in authority, and into other portions of our wonderful Liturgy, we shall be struck at the number and depth of the expressions, which are applicable to our present needs, and we shall feel that in *our Common Prayer* we have abundant provision for all times and for all trials. God, most merciful, help us to enter into these fervent devotions with all our hearts. Give peace, O Lord, in our time. Make a way for us to escape out of our unhappy divisions. Restore to our beloved country a spirit of unity and love ; and grant that this great nation may be a wise and understanding nation, exalted by righteousness, and preserved by a gracious Providence to the end of time, to be the bulwark of liberty and true religion, and the home of the weary and heavy laden of all lands.

Your affectionate friend and brother in Christ,

HORATIO POTTER,

Provisional Bishop of New York.

New York, December 12, 1860.





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